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ABSTRACT

This study examined the substance, researched the history, tracked the growth, and documented the expression of the feminine voice. Patriarchy, as a critical, formative construct, is viewed from historical, religious, and societal perspectives. The emergence and growth of the Feminist era was also considered as a source of support to feminine expression. A four-question interview with 15 women, all residents of western Colorado, generated abundant information about the essence and expression of the feminine voice. Interview questions considered how feminine expression is facilitated, communicated, responded to, and further promoted. This study of the diverse and multi-faceted feminine voice suggests that self-in-relationship is one common factor in all feminine expression, and that much expression is facilitated and sustained by support, validation, and encouragement. The most natural area for further research would appear to be a study of the feminine component of the male voice. (Contains 38 references. Appended are the interview questions, transcribed interviews, and two handouts.) (Author/BT)

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Coaching the Voice of the Feminine

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ABSTRACT

Coaching the Voice of the Feminine

This qualitative study examines the substance, researches the history, tracks the growth, and documents the expression of the feminine voice. Patriarchy, as a critical, formative construct, is viewed from historical, religious, and societal perspectives. The emergence and growth of the Feminist era is also considered as a source of support to feminine expression. A four-question interview with fifteen women generates abundant information about the essence and expression of the feminine voice. Interview questions consider how feminine expression is facilitated, communicated, responded to, and further promoted. This study of the diverse and multi-faceted feminine voice suggests that self-in-relationship is one common factor in all feminine expression, and that such expression is facilitated and sustained by support, validation, and encouragement.

Coaching the Voice of the Feminine

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

> How might your life have been different if there had been a place for you, a place for you to go to with your mother, with your sisters and the aunts, with your grandmothers, and the great- and great-great-grandmothers, a place for women to go, to be, to return to, as women? (Duerk, 1993, p. 19)

This project considers this question by scanning the feminine dimension of 20th century literature, and by coding, analyzing, and interpreting information gathered in the research process. The hunch underlying this work is that support, validation, and encouragement enable a woman to express her voice. Conversely, research will also illustrate the lack of affirmation or validation that silences a woman's voice. A further supposition is that past and/or current support, validation, and encouragement will help a woman express her voice, should she encounter resistance.

A woman's voice, for the purpose of this work, is the expression of her thoughts, choices, feelings, and opinions. Beneath this simple definition lies a vast and complex network that both forms and informs the structure and tendencies of the feminine voice. The depth and breadth of a woman's voice is such that no single perspective can provide a comprehensive description. This work will:

- Explore historical, developmental, theoretical, cultural, biological, and spiritual themes of women's voice
- Recognize unique ways in which women express their voice
- Consider multi-faceted ramifications of such expression
- Identify possible strategies to encourage such expression

This study evolved from my own life path. It is a qualitative research project that is somewhat autobiographical in nature. I am a child of older German immigrants, born in 1900 and 1904, who came to America in 1930. I married a German man in Germany 31 years ago. My life has taken place in a predominantly male setting. I had two brothers--no sisters, two sons--no daughters. All of my house pets from childhood on (one canary and six dogs) were male. I lived at home through college, traveled to Germany after graduation, worked for the United States military, and immediately connected with a native German man. My religious upbringing was German Lutheran, with a strong belief in a protective, stern, and judging Father--who quite resembled my own.

My status as the only female in various life situations taught me the behaviors, thought patterns, and attitudes that were acceptable to and expected by the males in my life. My feminine nature, and that of my collective female ancestry, was not recognized, known, accepted, or encouraged. The result was that my own voice remained pre-embryonic. It wasn't even conceived (of) until later in my life, when I simultaneously discovered internal and experienced external support.

This qualitative study, therefore, is aimed at understanding the interactive dimension of female subjects' lives as they express their voice. It employs the qualitative research methods of interview and a focus group. Women will be interviewed to determine how they came to express their voice, how they actually do express their unique voice, and how that expression impacts their relationships and experiences. A subsequent focus group, which I will facilitate and in which I will also participate, will afford opportunity for in-depth reflection. This is an interpretive project. Narrative and metaphor analysis will allow subject input to be recorded, sorted, distilled, and summarized.

With this research work, I honor the growth process of my life. I dedicate this effort to the healing of past generations of women and to the strengthening of the feminine voice in the future. I believe that, since I was able to conquer my ancestral and cultural legacy, my voiceless experience, and since I learned to acknowledge, accept, believe in, trust, and express my own truth, then it truly *is* possible for a woman to find her voice and to express it.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Coaching the voice of the feminine is a creative and worthy endeavor. It is a proactive venture that juxtaposes the concept of support with that of expression--in this case, feminine expression. Offering support to the feminine voice requires an understanding of just what that voice is. To achieve such understanding, it is helpful to consider literature that addresses the feminine story, searching for configuration and definition. This literary search identifies the characteristics and properties of the feminine, and tracks formative external and internal parameters and guidelines. The following review of literature considers the societal and cultural impact of patriarchy on women, and the evolution of woman's voice within Judeo-Christian culture.

Cultural Foundations of Patriarchy

Prior to the existence of Judeo-Christian culture, mythic goddess culture prevailed. Numerous literary works explore goddess culture and analyze mythic and archetypal gender sagas. These works reveal a world in which women were honored and held in high esteem (Anderson & Hopkins, 1991; Estes, 1992; Woodman, 1992). Centuries of conflict and conquest eventually denigrated the feminine until, in the Middle Ages, many women experienced brutal abuse (Bolen, 1985; Estes, 1992). Following the Biblical

perspective that woman caused man to sin and was therefore rightfully condemned to suffer, men of the Judeo-Christian God deemed violence against women justifiable, even holy. The history of Western culture records the death of thousands of women who used their instinctive, intuitive wisdom to nurse and heal in the dark years of the second millennium (Anderson & Hopkins, 1991; Estes, 1992; Kidd, 1996; Reilly, 1995; Woodman, 1992). Late 20th century culture contains an emerging theme of freedom from oppression for women. Stories from the Bible, from history books, and even from today's newspapers, however, continue to document male physical and emotional dominance.

History, as recorded in the Judeo-Christian world, has been planned, orchestrated, and performed by the male half of humanity. War, governments, industry, and business have been conducted and controlled by men. In folklore and legend, women comprise the support cast for men. The culturally desired pinnacle for women's lives is not adventure or experience, but rather safety and closure (Gilligan, 1982).

As women formed and yielded to cultural expectations, they grew up surrounded by silence about the inner sufferings and private struggles of other women. The inevitable result was a feeling of isolation (Nobel, 1990). Western culture has and does *expect* women to be pleasing, agreeable, compliant, passive--and silent (Anderson & Hopkins, 1991; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger,

& Tarule, 1986; Belenky, 1985; Gilligan, 1982; Kidd, 1996; Lerner, 1993; Miller, J.B., 1973; Miller, J.B., 1976; Reilly, 1995; Sullivan, 1989; Tomlinson-Keasey, 1997).

Western history, religion, psychology, and culture have prescribed and structured desirable and acceptable behavior and demeanor for women(Anderson & Hopkins, 1991; Belenky et al., 1986; Kidd, 1996; Reilly, 1995; Woodman, 1992). A society that values, promotes, listens to, and reveres the male person and perspective, cannot but endorse the acquiescence of the feminine (Crawford & Unger, 1997). Western culture defines feminine as "pleasing, helpful, palatable, amenable" (Jack, 1991, p. 55). Domestic as well as professional tranquility seems to hinge on the degree to which woman does or does not accept and agree with the male conception of/about herself (Miller, J. B., 1965).

Thousand of years of collective history and energy have declared the way of the male (self-not-in-relationship) as superior to the way of the female (self-in-relationship), thereby confirming the masculine voice as correct, desirable, and worthy (Belenky, et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1992; Miller, J. B., 1976). The feminine voice, based upon connection and relationship, is consequently regarded as inferior and immature, and has therefore been discouraged or silenced (Gilligan, 1992; Jack, 1991).

Yet, in spite of millennia in which the relational feminine voice was quelled and suppressed, it was not completely extinguished. Poignant accounts exist of women who maintained a tenacious grip on their own sense and expression of self. Elizabeth C. Stanton, Margaret Sanger, Helen Keller, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Rosa Parks are only a few of the brave women in past generations who secretly and/or openly refused to let their voices die. Women such as these created a platform upon which courageous women of the 21st century now stand to express their own truth (Anderson & Hopkins, 1991; Belenky, et al., 1986; Borysenko, 1996; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, 1987; Jack, 1991; Miller, J. B., 1976; Reilly, 1995; Woodman, 1992).

In the waning decades of the second millennium, many women in western culture were slowly emerging from a deep state of psychological/emotional sleep. Clarissa Pinkola Estes states:

> When a woman is exhorted to be compliant, cooperative, and quiet, to not make upset or go against the old guard, she is pressed into living a most unnatural life--a life that is self-binding. . . without innovation. The worldwide issue for women is that under such conditions they are not only silenced, they are put to sleep (Taylor, 1992, p. 63).

Illustrations of the awaking feminine span the past century. From the writings of Charlotte Gilman at the beginning of the 20th century, to Sue Monk Kidd's "Dance of the Dissident Daughter" at the close of the century, the voice of women authors has cried out against cultural parameters of acceptance,

which limit, confine, and silence woman's voice. In the public arena, early in the century Susan B. Anthony and other courageous woman fought tirelessly to gain the right for women to express their voice through voting. A later 20th century frontier for women's rights has been the professional arena, involving issues of finance, promotion, childcare, and sexual bias (Belenky, 1986; Borysenko, 1996; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, 1987; Jack, 1991). During the past century women fought for and won, not only the right to vote, but also to work, to study, to parent by choice, and to partner by preference. Women are waking up from centuries of culturally imposed slumber to acknowledge their own existence (Anderson & Hopkins, 1991; Kidd, 1996; Reilly, 1995).

Religious Foundations of Patriarchy

Further examination of patterns that have silenced the feminine voice leads inevitably to the religious foundation of patriarchy. Within patriarchy, an individual gives up all or some responsibility to a head person, thereby creating a hierarchical model of conduct (Woodman, 1992). The head of the table, of the household, of the school, of the business, of the church, or the government--six thousand years of recorded history shows these leaders to be male. The Judeo-Christian saga reveals a social system that regards the father to be the head of the family. Family descent is traced and recorded

through the paternal line. The concept of male Deity and dominance, and (therefore) female culpability and submission, is the sine qua non of the patriarchal system (Anderson & Hopkins, 1991; Bolen, 1985; Borysenko, 1996; Kidd, 1996; Reilly, 1995; Woodman, 1992).

Authors of feminine spirituality recognize that, inasmuch as God is regarded as male and his representatives rule this earth, women and their concerns are peripheral (Anderson & Hopkins, 1991; Kidd, 1996; Reilly, 1995). Anderson & Hopkins, Bolen, Borysenko, Kidd, Luke, Reilly, and Woodman are among those who have expanded the development of woman's voice into the spiritual realm. Their joint thesis is that Divinity is not a solely masculine entity, and that woman's innate characteristics of intuition and connectedness are not faulty--that they are, in fact, divine.

Woman in the second half of the 20th century recognized a collective as well as an individual, spiritual wound. Kidd identifies this wound as:

> . . . the devaluation and negation of the feminine, the disconnection of women from their feminine soul, the silencing of the *real* voices of women, the loss of the feminine feet, hands, mouths, and hearts (Kidd, 1996, p. 168).

Reilly agrees, stating,

> Engraved within the wound and ineffective behaviors that trouble us as adults are the life patterns, gender attitudes, and family customs rooted in our religious past (Reilly, 1995, p. 24).

The Judeo-Christian tradition has made a powerful contribution to the evolution of patriarchy. Many current authors refer to the "feminine wound" that has resulted from this evolution (Anderson & Hopkins, 1991; Kidd, 1996; Reilly, 1995; Woodman, 1992). Anne W. Schaef's description of the feminine wound is "the original sin of being born female." She further states,

> To be born female in this culture means that you are born tainted, that there is something intrinsically wrong with you that you can never change, that your birthright is one of innate inferiority (Kidd, 1996, p. 28).

The (his)story of the Judeo-Christian tradition blames woman for bringing evil into the world. Church fathers, such as St. Augustine, reinforced by Biblical passages affirming the dominance and authority over woman by man, believed that man, but not woman, was created in the likeness and image of God (Kidd, 1996). The construct within which the feminine wound was created, namely female sinfulness, was fashioned after passages in the Bible (such as the following) that affirm woman's evil nature (Anderson & Hopkins, 1992; Borysenko, 1996; Kidd, 1996; Reilly, 1995).

> Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor (Holy Bible, I Timothy 2:11-14, RSV).

The inherent sinfulness of woman became a basic tenet of Christianity. Women could find salvation only by silencing their voice, either by marriage, childbearing, and submission to their husband, or by perpetual virginity, in which the essence of female biological and sexual expression was repressed (Anderson & Hopkins, 1991; Kidd, 1996; Reilly, 1995).

Through the ages, however, women have demonstrated an innate ability to use adversity and trial as opportunities for spiritual awakening and growth (Anderson & Hopkins, 1991). Recorded history has presented innumerable situations in which women struggled to awaken and to rise from the unconscious sleep. As a woman begins to wake up--to let go of formerly accepted stories, rituals, and traditions, tremendous uncertainty fills the space where concrete, inflexible rules once held sway (Kidd, 1996). As the following quote illustrates, the expression of voice requires courage and tenacity.

A monologue in Naomi Newman's play Snake Talk: Urgent Messages from the Mother, addresses the enormous void created when old ways crumble and fall away, and offers her scheme for growth. The character Rifke pointedly counsels the audience,

> Now we are going to make *new-way* path. So you take a shovel, you take a ground-hacker, you take a hairpin. If all you got is a hairpin, you take a hairpin and you start digging. And you dig in all directions: up and down, in and out, right and left. Not in a straight line. Nothing natural or interesting goes in

> a straight line. . . And don't pretend you know where you are going, because if you know where you are going, that means you've been there, and you are going to end up exactly where you came from (Anderson & Hopkins, 1991, p. 206).

Describing deep angst as she felt herself drawn toward a personal awakening, another female spiritual author kept whispering to herself,

> Maybe I can find a way to live within patriarchal hierarchy and theology, take the good, ignore the rest. I won't think too much about what's not here. It will be OK. It really will (Kidd, 1996, p. 79).

As she went forward in her growth process, Kidd further recorded:

> When a woman starts to disentangle herself from patriarchy, ultimately she is abandoned to her own self. She comes to an unknown place where she must let the old way of being woman die and the new way come forth (Kidd, 1996, p. 99).

Duerk, in her pioneering work encouraging woman's voice, finds its true source in the depths of woman's experience.

> Most helpful of all for a woman to remember as she seeks her own voice is that it will emerge only when she speaks from her own true nature and experience, only when she expresses what she cares most dearly about and what is her own unique and individual truth (Duerk, 1993, p. 110).

The spiritual or inner dimension of woman's voice lends poignant depth to its content. This is a voice concerned with process rather than product, with silence rather than sermons, with listening to one's inner cry rather than to the words of another. It also seeks a free, intimate relationship with the

Divine rather than a structured and rule-bound association. The spiritual dimension of woman's voice is important because, by its very nature, it is an apt vehicle for expression of inner-personal/inter-personal intimacy (Anderson & Hopkins, 1991; Borysenko, 1996; Kidd, 1996; Luke, 1995).

Overcoming inner reluctance to confront patterns, parents, and a patriarchal God, women have begun to question the accepted image of masculine Divinity. By dialoging with other women, by reading courageous writers, and by looking deep within for an eternal connection/relationship, women are changing the face of God to resemble their own (Reilly, 1995). Reilly explains that the act of evolving the face of God from masculine to feminine occurs over time. Such an enormous evolutionary transformation involves an inner journey toward self-love and self-trust. Practices of meditation, imaging, and prayer allow the relational, intuitive feminine psyche to recognize and hallow the inner presence of the Divine feminine.

When perception of the Divine expands to contain the essence of woman, then spirituality becomes an affirming, empowering, healing ointment on the feminine wound. Women are beginning to express their voices through sharing with other women, through considering Divine feminine symbols, and through recognizing the feminine face of God (Anderson & Hopkins, 1991; Borysenko, 1996; Kidd, 1996; Reilly, 1995; Woodman, 1992).

Biology Contributes to Woman's Voice

Female biology makes a unique contribution to the feminine voice. A girl's physical/emotional mother-bond can remain inviolate through early childhood and into the latency years. During this time anatomical pathways between the limbic system and the forebrain create the executive function of morality. As girls observe and recognize the forms of behavior that cause separation, neural pathways based on connection and responsibility are established (Borysenko, 1996).

This biological process can now be traced, as follows: Glial cells, which constitute much of the brain mass, create the myelin sheath insulating layer that facilitates electrical impulse transmission within the body. Borysenko explains,

> There are certain critical periods during development that are like transient windows of opportunity for neuronal hookup and myelination… The more a pathway is used in early childhood, the more it becomes myelinated, and the harder it is to change, which explains why our basic patterns of perceiving and responding to the world are in place by the time we are seven. Change is possible in later years by myelinating new pathways, but that change may require tremendous effort, considerable therapy, and sustained attention over many years, since the initial circuitry will always remain Borysenko, 1996, p. 20-21).

Beyond the growth producing, pre-menstrual years, women experience the physical hormonal phenomenon of the reproductive cycle. The physical metamorphosis of pregnancy, the experience of giving birth, and the subsequent journey of mothering underscore and intensify the feminine view of self-in-

relationship. Yet, even for women who do not undergo the physical birthing and mothering experience, the cyclical rise and fall of hormones occurs. A perpetual waxing and waning of estrogen and progesterone levels facilitates a natural bio-emotional cycle.

During the follicular phase (between menstruation and ovulation) of the menstrual cycle, in which estrogen levels are high, women tend to be more outgoing and creative. In the luteal phase (between ovulation and menstruation), when progesterone levels are high, women are more inner directed (Borysenko, 1996). Thus, woman's biology contributes to a fluid and pliant posture, an ebb and flow of emotion and energy, encompassing not only the physical, but also the emotional (relational) and spiritual (interior) realms.

Pathology, addiction, and illness also demonstrate the intricate bio/psycho connection in women's bodies. When women are denied expression of their thoughts and feelings, the unreleased energy is often turned inward. This inward thrust of repression can result not only in depression and in potential addiction, but also in diseases such as asthma, heart disease, and cancer (Borysenko, 1996).

Development of the Feminine Voice

Biology, culture, and personal experience combine to shape female developmental models (Belenky, et al., 1986, Gilligan,

1982; Gilligan, 1991; Jack, 1991; Lee, 1997; Miller, J. B., 1976; Sullivan, B, 1989; Wastel, 1996). From the patriarchal point of view, the psychological dimension of woman's development looks unfinished, feels inadequate, seems incomplete. When assessing women on a scale that doesn't contain their unit of measure, results can appear rather weak, indeed. Women, while being considered well adjusted *as women* (i.e. pleasing, compliant, submissive), are nevertheless often viewed as developmentally/psychologically immature, incomplete, or faulty when measured against male developmental models that encourage separation and autonomy (Rose, 1991).

An interesting illustration of interpretive contrast in psychological/emotional male and female development is seen in responses to Lawrence Kohlberg's fabricated story of Heinz and his sick wife. Kohlberg devised the scenario to measure moral (concerns with good versus bad, or issues arising from conscience) development in adolescence by presenting a moral dilemma and examining the logic of its resolution (Belenky, et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1882). Heinz could not afford to pay for the medicine that would save his terminally ill wife. A question is posed to boys and girls at varying ages as to how Heinz's dilemma should best be solved, namely, should he or should he not steal the medicine? Tapping deep issues of

morality, conclusions of this research were extraordinarily revealing.

In Kohlberg's study his male subject (Jake) considered the dilemma to be "sort of like a math problem with humans" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 26). Jake viewed it as an equation to be rationally, logically solved. The obvious solution was for Heinz to steal the medicine because it was, to Jake, justifiable. The female subject (Amy) regarded the dilemma more as a "narrative of relationships that extends over time" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 28). Her world of relationship contained an awareness of connection between people, and recognized responsibility of one person for another. Amy's resolution suggests clearer communication between Heinz and his wife and the pharmacist, who sells the "too expensive" medicine. Does the pharmacist understand the severity of the situation? In what other ways could Heinz and his wife earn the money for the drug? Who would care for Heinz's wife if he went to jail for stealing the drug? Questions such as these indicate awareness of overlapping levels of responsibility (Belenky, et al.; 1986, Gilligan, 1982). Kohlberg regarded the male resolution of this moral dilemma to be superior to the female solution that considered overlapping responsibilities. Results, however, seem to indicate that the feminine moral approach is based on an ethic of responsibility rather than on an ethic of rights

(Belenky, et al., 1985; Belenky, et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, 1991).

As a field that further explored and sought to explain human development, psychology in the 19th and 20th centuries, fell categorically in sync with historical and cultural patterns of the times. Giants in the field conceived theories that reflected societal norms. Freud, who believed women were inferior to men because they lacked and envied male genitalia, attributed female developmental failure to the girl child's penis envy and pre-Oedipal attachment (Gilligan, 1982). Jung greatly expanded on and departed from Freud's position, recognizing the woman within the man and the man within the woman (anima-animus) (Miller, J. B., 1976).

Other theorists, however, continued to focus only on the male. For example, Kohlberg's six stages of development are based on a longitudinal study (over 20 years) of 84 male subjects (Gilligan, 1982). Piaget offered a patriarchal sequel to Freudian thought as he only peripherally mentioned girls in his developmental schemas of intellectual evolution (Gilligan, 1982; Sullivan, 1989). Erikson used as his pattern and goal the move toward autonomy and separation, which step-by-developmental-step is ideally accomplished as the subject (read: male) matures (Belenky, et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, 1987).

In contrast, the feminine perspective contains a description and goal of development other than autonomy and separation. It is concerned with the capacity for understanding, care, and integration. It focuses on conflicting responsibilities rather than on competing rights, as in the masculine construct.

In another sense, it can be said that for men, identity precedes intimacy, while for women intimacy precedes or happens simultaneously with identity (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, 1987). Gilligan explains that while the masculine finds its definition in separation from the mother (in order to achieve individuation), the feminine develops *within* attachment to the mother. Clearly, the resulting patterns are at odds, masculine identity being comfortable with separation and threatened by intimacy, and feminine identity experiencing the reverse. Since, in psychology, developmental markers and maturational milestones reflect increasing separation, women's failure to separate then becomes, by definition, "a failure to develop" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 9).

In contrast, Carol Gilligan reframed women's psychological development. Focusing on the struggle for connection rather than the inability to achieve separation, she proposed that woman's relational nature ultimately is a strength, not a weakness. In describing her groundbreaking thesis, Gilligan held that--

> The different (woman's) voice. . . is a relational voice: a voice that insists on staying in connection.

> . . so that psychological separations, which have long been justified in the name of autonomy, selfhood, and freedom, no longer appear as the *sine quo non* of human development, but as a human problem (Gilligan, 1982, p. xiii).

What is this "different" (feminine) voice? It is the natural, cultural, psychological core of a woman, as expressed in rhythm and language, in words, or in sounds (Gilligan, 1982). To express her voice, Duerk further states:

> A woman must break out of the old mold. She must risk disobeying the given decrees, those dictated from outside as well as those written within her by her past. She must confront her internalized patriarchs and break out of the role of good girl, good woman, that they have scripted for her. She must submit to the dread that breaking the old commandments will bring (Duerk, 1993, p. 80).

To assist women in retrieving and expressing their voice, it is helpful for all theoretical views to examine the cultural bias that denigrates female developmental qualities (Sullivan, 1989). In feminine theory, interpersonal intimacy is regarded as the bottom-line organizer of experience, bringing life experiences and events into focus and providing the key to understanding the female voice. Interpersonal intimacy, as here used, involves connection, responsibility, and communication. It calls for relationships to weigh more than results, and for affiliation to supersede autonomy (Belenky, et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Jack, 1991; Miller, J. B., 1976; Sullivan, 1989, Wastel, 1996).

Woman's voice is fueled by the feminine view of life. Research at Wellesley College's Stone Center has defined that view as an "interdependent web of mutually enhancing relationship" (Borysenko, 1996, p. 25). Psychologist Janet Surrey, in documenting results of the Stone Center study, cites the concept of self-in-relationship, of interdependence as the *primary organizing principle of the female view of life* (Borysenko, 1996). While the masculine developmental pattern begins with separation and strives toward autonomy, female development both evolves from and moves toward connection (Gilligan, 1982; Jack, 1991; Miller, J. B., 1981; Wastel, 1996). This difference underlies the schism between male and female development.

Conarton & Kreger-Silverman's prototype of feminine growth draws a line in the sand, articulating a separate and unique pattern and goal of female behavior and desire. This developmental theory gives structure to Gilligan's image of the relational feminine. As Erikson's stages traverse the lifespan of its male subject, so Conarton & Kreger-Silverman's stages delineate female developmental experience.

Conarton & Kreger-Silverman's first stage of bonding is not merely one to be completed and then left behind. Rather, it is the first building block of healthy female existence, a permanent piece of feminine essence, from which the nurturing

role of woman emanates. In contrast to Erikson's model, Conarton & Kreger-Silverman posit that female evolution tends to move from the outside in (from being other-oriented to possessing inner awareness) while male development progresses from the inside out (from focus on separation and autonomy to intimacy and generativity) (Waster, 1996). In other words, in Erikson's male model, identity precedes intimacy and generativity. In the female model, however, intimacy precedes or occurs simultaneously with identity, when woman comes to know herself as she is known through her relationships with others (Gilligan, 1987).

Feminine development is gradually being understood and supported in progressive circles. Dedicated women have pioneered the expression and acceptance of the feminine voice in western society. This study considers a representative sampling of those whose words and actions that have supported woman's voice.

Pioneers in Support of Woman's Voice

Tracking the development of woman's voice in the 20th century through literature is a formidable task. Pioneers in support of woman's voice have broken the ground, as well as the silence, to allow the raw truth of the feminine to be shared. Stories such as that of Margo Chisholm honor the unique, multi-faced female process of recovery, healing, and growth. Margo's

1997 documentary describes her harrowing conquests over addictions and mountains. On the other hand, Charlotte Gilman's turn of the 20th century writings contain a poignant account of a woman, forbidden by her husband *any* avenue of self-expression, who slowly lost her mind. By comparing such contrasting personal accounts, the astonishing 20th century metamorphosis of woman's voice can be seen.

From early considerations of children vis-à-vis parents, pioneers such as Alice Miller expanded the image of subordinates/dominants to juxtapose women and men (Miller, A., 1981). Jean Baker Miller followed this line of thought in exploring situations of inequality and documenting her qualitative findings. She discovered that subordinates, regardless of race, gender, or other circumstances, are encouraged to develop certain characteristics that are pleasing to the dominant group, namely submissiveness, docility, dependency, passivity, inability to think and to act, and lack of initiative. Miller concluded that if and when subordinates adopt such characteristics, they are then considered by patriarchal culture to be well adjusted (Miller, J. B., 1976).

Carol Gilligan's seminal work, In a Different Voice, proposed that women speak in a "different voice" as they tell the story of their lives. Clarissa Pinkola Estes' widely read Women Who Run With the Wolves encouraged women to be true to

their own nature. Many other women writers beyond those referenced in this work, such as Elaine Pagels, Jean Houston, Regina Ryan, Carol Flinders, and Angeles Arrien have written in support of feminine expression. Dana Crowley Jack researched how subordinate behavior and the resultant silencing of the subordinate voice leads to depression. Joan Borysenko and Marion Woodman focused on the emergent expression and manifestation of the newly identified feminine voice across the span of life, while Harriet Lerner gave permission for women to express anger, and publicly uncovered the deception of the subordinate role.

Impassioned works of female authors and activists, such as those mentioned above, encouraged the development and expression of the feminine voice. Today's support for the feminine voice can be found in public and work arenas, in therapy relationships, and in family settings.

Support for and Therapeutic Means to Enable a Woman's Voice

Woman's voice has now been identified and acknowledged, and often receives support and encouragement to make itself heard. By believing and affirming that all that a woman needs for the recovery of her voice is contained within, a therapist can help a woman to achieve that recovery. Coming from a position of not-knowing, of experience, with a focus on being rather than on doing, the feminine therapy approach facilitates healing from within (Sullivan, 1989). Group work is an invaluable method

when dealing with participants whose inner bottom line is self-in-relationship. Within groups, women offer and receive support, validation, and encouragement, thereby gathering resources necessary to project their voice (McManus, Redford, & Hughes, 1997).

The narrative therapy approach has also been successful for adolescent girls as they re-author their relationship with authority to include their own voice (Lee, 1997). It invites the girl or the woman to externalize what has been buried inside. With skilled guidance, the emerging adolescent (either the actual one or the one locked within a grown, mature woman) can address and eventually answer the ultimate boundary question, "Where do others end and I begin?" (Borysenko, 1996; Gilligan, 1982). As the first safe and supportive relationship some women have ever had, the therapeutic alliance is often an arena in which women feel truly heard (Borysenko, 1996; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, 1991; Jack, 1991; Lerner, 1993; Miller, J. B., 1973; Miller, J. B., 1976; Sullivan, 1989). Even though women have made great strides toward self-expression in education, employment, and childcare, it is still not considered acceptable for women to show anger (Hercus, 1999). *Complete* acceptance within the therapy setting therefore has enormous value and power to heal, and for many women is a haven of safety. The feminine approach to therapy insists that, rather

than interpreting a woman's story, the therapist needs to be *with* a woman in attentive receptiveness (Jack, 1991; Sullivan, 1989).

These many facets of the feminine therapeutic approach hold relationship (as association, a dealing, or a connection between people or things) as key. By speaking and understanding the relational language of the feminine, such therapy allows a safe foundation to be established. It hears, affirms, and supports the truth of a woman's story.

Family is the setting in which patterns of communication are learned, and is therefore the ultimate crucible of relationship. Learned patterns of pleasing, agreeing, acquiescing, or conforming (in relationship to parents) can lead a girl child to disregard and eventually to dismiss her own inner promptings (Belenky, et al., 1986; Borysenko, 1996; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, 1987; Gilligan, 1991; Jack, 1991; Miller, A., 1981; Miller, J. B., 1973; Miller, J. B., 1976). Each parent has the golden opportunity of supporting, validating and encouraging his or her child, thereby bequeathing authenticity and freedom to subsequent generations. The parental act of greatest import and impact on a child's sense of self-esteem and worth is that of *listening* (Gilligan, 1982; Jack, 1991; Miller, J. B., 1976). If a girl child's voice is heard, as an adult her voice will not be silent (Jack, 1991).

The enormous importance of a healthy mother-daughter relationship is repeatedly documented. A daughter, as her mother's apprentice, watches closely to see what it means to be a mother, a wife, a woman (Lerner, 1993). Girls tend to admire their mothers for speaking out, and to honor their fathers for listening to them (Belenky, et al., 1986). A mother holds in her hands, and controls by her expectations and interaction, the emerging self-concept of her daughter. A father, by validating and encouraging his daughter to explore, and by listening as she expresses her thoughts and feelings, contributes immensely to her growth and development as a woman (Borysenko, 1996; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan 1991; Jack, 1991; Miller, J. B., 1976; Tomlinson-Keasey, 1997). Since a sense of identity in a growing child requires the existence of another by whom the child is known, the responsibility for development of the child's sense of self falls first and foremost to the parents (Jack, 1991).

Ultimately, however, a woman is her own teacher and coach as she learns to express her voice. Gilligan posits the primary developmental task of adolescent young women to be that of learning to be true to one's self without being selfish concerning the needs of others. The accomplishment of this task is indeed a work that often stretches far into a woman's adult life, and requires that she be willing to defy many cultural patterns (Borysenko, 1996; Gilligan, 1972; Gilligan, 1987).

Considering herself as having value, dignity, and inner power is the act that shatters the silence and restores the voice of the feminine (Anderson & Hopkins, 1991; Kidd, 1996; Reilly, 1995; Woodman, 1992).

Summary

The feminine spirit is relational, responsible, and resolute. It moves toward intimacy and finds meaning in connection. It is driven to achieve *inter* (rather than *in*) dependence (Belenky, et al., 1986; Borysenko, 1996; Gilligan, 1982; jack, 1991; Miller, J. B., 1976; Wastel, 1996). Woman's voice is the outward expression and manifestation of this spirit.

Myriad are the stories of tenacious, indomitable, resolute women with dogged and unflinching determination to manifest their spirit in the world. Margo Chisholm's physical and spiritual journey to overcome addictions and eating disorders took her to the top of six of the planet's seven continents. Her courage is contagious to women aspiring to evolve (Chisholm, 1997). Nobel challenges women to confront the historical and cultural expectations of obedience and silence as they embark upon their personal hero journeys (Nobel, 1990). Tomlinson-Keasey and Lerner encourage women to come out of the closet with their opinions, intelligence, humor, and strength, and to offer

these magnificent gifts to humankind, to each other, and to themselves. In the 1997 book, "The Yellow Wallpaper," the writing of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a highly spirited, internationally acclaimed author, lecturer, and activist for women's rights, who lived from 1860 to 1935 and, poignantly attests to the resilient, albeit often concealed, feminine spirit. Added to these are many women who pioneered for women's rights through the centuries, remarkable women who demonstrated the broad scope of woman's vigorous, potent, and often-outrageous spirit. This expansive, irrepressible spirit is the primary source of woman's voice.

This summation of select literature concerning the past plight and present status of women's existence within the realm of patriarchy is directed toward the future. By examining existing constructs and researching their etiologies, the patriarchal posture of Judeo-Christian culture has been revealed in its true nature, demystified, and thereby divested of its power to dominate. Proponents of traditional patriarchy tend to dismiss the works here sited (Gilligan, 1991; Hercus, 1999; Lee, 1997; Miller, J. B., 1976; Snelling, 1999; Tomlinson-Keasey, 1997). Feminine evolution, however, flies in the face of such tradition, and refuses to accept such dismissal. Additionally, the examination of the nature and source of the feminine voice has given substance and credibility to its expression. The

feminine voice is no longer seen as an immature, nebulous, untenable expression of passivity. Rather, it is recognized as the articulation of qualities unique to the feminine spirit that are of high value and significant worth.

Chapter III

METHODS

This study is carried out through a qualitative method of research. It attempts to correlate and evaluate patterns or themes in a woman's life with the expression of her voice. It deals with issues that cannot be systematically measured, and is therefore an apt subject for qualitative inquiry. The individualized, personalized data that will be gathered in this study defy research methods that seek exact measure or specific conclusion. Themes that manifest in the interview and/or focus group format of this study will reveal layer upon intricate layer of personal experience, as expressed in language or through other personal means. Stable, structured, objective results, which are the goal of quantitative inquiry, are simply not available in this mode of research. Therefore, the narrative, qualitative methods of interview, observation, and interaction will be implemented in this study.

Process

The qualitative nature of this work allows considerable latitude in format. Demographics and time constraints of the participants, however, impose considerable limitation. A sequence of group meetings with acceptable attendance levels is not a realistic expectation in this area during the summer

months. Therefore, the format of this research project will be an individual interview with 15 women. Also, a focus group, with as many interviewees as are available, will meet to discuss distinctive or common themes, and to facilitate further expression.

The interview questions (see Appendix 1) delve into each subject's life story to identify social, cultural, relational, spiritual, and developmental themes as they relate to expression of the subject's voice. Further questioning will seek to distinguish the unique character of each subject's voice, and to understand how each participant perceives the impact of expressing her voice on relationships and experiences. Finally, with an eye toward the future, interview questions will probe for suggestions and strategies subjects may have for coaching the voice of the feminine.

Each participant will select an interview site, either my office or another location of the interviewee's choice that would be comfortable and private. Because of geographic limitations, at least one telephone interview will be necessary. Although I know all of the subjects, few of them know or have met each other. I have a comfortable and open relationship with all of the participants, and each is willing and eager to participate. Tapes/transcriptions of interviews will be used to capture data for analysis. Prior written consent for

participation and for release of data for use in this study will be obtained.

Questions are designed to be neutral and thought provoking. Subjects expressed willingness to work and to share on a deep level and to respond with personal information, so that common themes and unique experiences can be identified and interpreted. There are no pre-conceived categories into which description will fall, rather the experience and perspective of each interviewee will be recorded, coded, and interpreted. Coding will involve identifying and organizing content, experience, context, process, affect, meaning, and expression, as well as factoring in details and nuances of each subject's responses.

Interview material may include deeply personal stories that must remain confidential. All participants will be requested to honor confidentiality. The open-ended nature of the interview questions and the focus group agenda reflect the flexible, personal nature of the feminine voice.

The focus group will provide material to supplement information gathered in the interview process. This group meeting (to be held in my home upon completion of all interviews and coding of data gathered) will provide the opportunity for subjects to consider and discuss common themes as well as unique distinctions that appeared in the interviews. After presenting themes that emerged from coding interview data, I will join the

group to explore and discuss points of congruence and points of departure. The focus group process will then also be coded, analyzed and interpreted to further support, or to contradict information gathered from the interviews.

Sample

The subjects selected for interviews comprise a fairly homogeneous group. I selected each woman because I believe she is able and willing to express her voice -- to communicate her personal essence through speech and action. All participants are eager to learn more about the feminine voice by participating in this project. All are residents of or property owners in western Colorado. All demonstrate a positive spirit in spite of challenges or tragedies that have occurred. Only one never married. Subjects are middle to upper class, and most are educated beyond high school. With only two exceptions, participants are between the ages of 40 and 60. Collectively, they comprise a group of vibrant and capable women.

Biographic information available for each participant prior to interviews is as follows:

Code#	Age	S/M/D/W*	Children	Siblings	Career	Religion
1.	30+	M/D/M	2	1	Homemaker	Protestant
2.	50+	Married	3	4	Professional	Catholic
3.	50+	Married	2	1	Homemaker	Protestant
4.	60+	Married	5	?	Hmkr & Teacher	Catholic
5.	50+	Married	0	?	Real Estate	New Age
6.	50+	Married	0	1	Teacher	Jewish
7.	40+	M/D/M	2	?	Therapist	New Age
8.	40+	Married	2	?	Sales Rep.	Protestant
9.	40+	Married	2	?	Hmkr & Artist	Protestant
10.	50+	Single	0	1	Therapist	New Age
11.	50+	M/D/M	2	?	Real Estate	Protestant
12.	50+	M/D	1	3	Sales	Protestant
13.	40+	M/D/M	2	?	Housekeeper	Catholic
14.	50+	M	4	2	Hmkr & Artist	Catholic

Ethical Considerations

Conducting an intimate and personal focus group in a small town presents an ethical challenge in that it magnifies the issue of confidentiality. Crucial to every encounter in psychology, confidentiality is the sine qua non of safety for subjects or clients. In a small town, where anonymity is rare, it is even more imperative that integrity and confidence be maintained. Subjects will be advised of the strict confidentiality policy of such a project. Concurrence with this policy will be written into the signed participation agreement. It will be addressed in every interview as well as emphasized in the opening and closing segments of the focus group.

The methodological approach of this study is interpretive. I will conduct interviews and code material with a phenomenological intent of considering various experiences that my participants relate. The hermeneutic direction of the study will focus on the *meaning* that participants attach to these experiences. Watching for encouragement or silencing of the feminine voice, I will interpret data by noticing words, phrases, or nuances that express what each disclosed experience or situation meant to the participant. I will use open, rather than closed interview questions to allow a full spectrum of responses.

The narrative nature of this project lends itself to reflective discussion and personal expression. Diversity/ similarity of interview content will provide rich material to be plumbed for meaning. The material will then be analyzed to identify meaningful images, schemes, or themes, and organized to reveal common or unique patterns.

Narrative research provides fascinating and colorful information. It can, however, lack form and parameter. Answers will be in story or anecdotal form, and it is possible, if not probable, that some of the data will be difficult to understand. In the coding process, categories will form themselves as they appear, reappear, and/or disappear in the data. Detailed coding

of themes (as presented in Appendix 6) will be essential to distill the essence of meaning from the narratives, so that interpretation will be valid.

Successful qualitative research discerns "What is really being said?" from "What is the researcher hearing?" (Merrick, 1999). Original content must be retained for coding and analysis, so that the actual words of the participants can speak for themselves. In the interviews and in the focus group, participants' words and meanings must be captured without personal interpretation.

Summary

The validity of this study is dependent upon astute selection of subjects and authenticity of data gathered.

The work of this study is to insure detailed and accurate transcription/coding of information, and comprehensive analysis of coded material.

The goal of this study is to observe and describe meaningful experiences that contribute to the expression of the feminine voice.

The hope for this study is that it be a platform--a place of reference for coaching the voice of the feminine.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

The active research segment of this project consisted of a four-question interview with fifteen women, transcriptions of which are attached as Appendix 2. The women responded to the questions by openly relating their lived experiences. Varied and multi-faceted as they were, the stories created a fascinating mosaic of feminine expression. However, upon examination, several common denominators also appeared, which revealed common requirements for and elements of such expression.

Results of the interviews showed that that which the feminine psyche needs for its development and maturity, it also gives as a matter of nature or instinct. Support, encouragement, and validation are shown to facilitate development of the feminine voice. And, true to the cyclical feminine nature, support, encouragement, and validation are found in its expression.

For this project I chose fifteen women who, in my opinion, do express their inner essence and do communicate their unique voice. The interview information was coded and organized as categories presented themselves. No pre-supposed categories existed. Rather, as interview after interview was transcribed, the categories and themes, as they appear in Appendix 6, were

identified and color-coded. The stories that the participants related in answer to the questions originally fell easily into large divisions of positive or negative experience. Yet, as the interviews proceeded, that split often blended and turned, revealing how experiences originally perceived as negative, eventually led to a positive result, such as patience, tenacity, or growth. One interviewee most poignantly shared this dynamic, as follows:

> I look at everything that happens in my life…and it's like writing a life journal. And I would write the things that happened, and lots of times they were negative - they were minus. I could only think of them in terms of plus and minus, and then, in time, be able to go back and re-read it, and, at the end of that page, whether it was a minus or a plus day– somehow it became a plus…because of whatever happened then that helped me to some other level or some other situation or experience, some other ability to say, "I remember when…" and hopefully to give some help. So hopefully, when I'm lying there in my nursing home, and you come to me, I can say, "Here's my book," and it's all plusses! Any you'll say, "No, you read my book, and it's all plusses, too!" We'll do that when we're old; it's something I look forward to.

As the stories unfolded, they suggested that "support" from a family member, a mentor, or a friend, was a -- if not *the* necessary condition for expression of the feminine voice. Support, in this context, refers to acceptance, encouragement, and validation. Only ten women cited positive relationships and interactions with parents, or, in several cases, grandparents. Yet, fourteen of the women had experienced support and encouragement from teachers, neighbors, or ministers.

Additionally, all fifteen women cited the support of peers and friends in their adult life as crucial to the continued expression of their voice.

Acceptance of a girl child, adolescent, or adult woman, coupled with encouragement of her curiosity and space for her to explore thoughts and feelings is the ideal soil in which feminine expression germinates.

Interview Questions

The questions of this study were phrased to elicit personal experience and opinion. Tapping the feminine practice of storytelling, they proved to be successful in drawing out story after story of past and present experience, as well as in providing a stage on which opinions could openly be expressed. The Four interview questions can be examined on the informative level, where answers provide factual, historical, real-life information. A closer look at the stories gathered in this study reveals a second level of inner experience. Moving deeper, a third level of experience, made manifest in action or life style, can be found. This chapter presents raw information gathered in the interviews. In a more interpretive and descriptive manner, deeper levels will be explored and expanded upon in the discussion chapter.

Interview Question #1a

1.a. Tell me about some people or experiences in your life that made you feel empowered to express your voice. Describe how these people or experiences impacted you.

Women who express their voice do appear to have been accepted, supported, and encouraged. From early childhood to the present day, each participant experienced at least one, if not many, sources of validation, including parents, grandparents, friends, teachers, clergy, mentors, co-workers, supervisors, husbands, and children. Such positive memories live on and manifest in feelings of self-acceptance. Question #1 accessed these memories, allowing them to be observed and examined.

Experiences of early childhood within the interviewed group ranged from living in warmly loving and bolstering families (#4-p.1, #6-p.1, #9-p.1, #10-p.1, #14-p.1, #15-p.1) to living with disapproving (#1-p.2, #3-p.2, #5-p.1,2,3, #7-p.1, #11-p.1&4, #12-p.5&6) and chemically dependent (#2-p.2, #8p.1) parents, to living in an orphanage (#13-p.1). Some stories revealed memories of security, bonding, laughter, and protection, while others spoke of upheaval, inordinate responsibility, and fear. So varied were the backgrounds of study participants.

There appeared to be, even in those participants for whom early support was lacking, a fortitude or innate resilience that enabled them to somehow believe in themselves and to express that belief. Although it appeared in varying intensities, and demonstrated diverse biochemistries, each of the participants referred to an innate trait that served them well when the expression of their voice was threatened. Almost half of the women described themselves as "feisty," while all of them admitted having a certain innate resilience that powered their expression (#3-p.2, #4-p.3, #5-p.1,2,6, #7-p.1,2,3, #8-p.1, #9-p.3, #10-p.1,2,3,5, #12, p.2,3, #13-p.1,2,5, #14-p.2,5, #15-p.1). The posture of resilience seemed to be a part of the participant's basic essence. "Resilience became something that, if you didn't have it– -you were going to perish" (#7). An internal, innate, ego-strength appeared across the board in participants, with the exception of one woman whose mother was clinically depressed yet untreated (#2-p.1,2,3). The question of nature vs. nurture enters here, and asks for further study to determine the impact of pathology on resilience.

The value of a positive attitude was not to be underestimated in the responses to this question. Persons, situations, or experiences that sought to silence these women's voices were seen as roadblocks to be detoured rather than as dead ends. "For the picture of my life, I'm more on a journey

that has a lot of fingers going out, and, whatever happens, it's where I'm going - and it's not a bad way, it's just a different way… I think (these situations) they're just temporary rocks that have to be moved" (#13).

Additionally travel, humor, nature, art, and spirituality served to strengthen the voices of the women. Visual, auditory, or sensual images of experiences in any or all of these arenas were stored as nutritional sustenance when negative events threatened to silence the participants. The women related that they derived strength from lessons gained through early travels (#1-p.1, #3-p.1,2,5, #14-p.1), through exposure to nature, education, and art (#4-p.2, #7-p.1, #9-p.2, #10-p.1,2,3, #11-p.2,5, #15-p.1), through warm humor within the family of origin (#6-p.1,2, #9-p.1, #13-p.5, #15-p.2), or through deep spiritual experiences (#3-p.4,5, #8-p.1, #9-p.1, #14-p.2).

All study participants told of current career, familial, or social situations that bolstered confidence and facilitated expression. Each woman shared what transpired in her past, and also related current life events that manifest the expression of the feminine voice. Rich and colorful stories demonstrated the feminine traits of receiving and giving support, encouragement, empathy, and trust.

> "I was never put down. It was: of course you could do that. You can do whatever you want to do"(#4). "I think it was my upbringing - I really do! We just grew up with so much love and so much laughter and so much humor and zaniness. There's nobody who's ever going to be as proud of me as mom and dad. And there's nobody who's going to be as happy for me as my mom and dad" (#6). "Well, we all come from our parents, and that's where it starts…we were listened to, and that was probably the beginning of it"(#9). "My paternal grandmother…was one of those grandmothers who was great for you…she was just a presence in my life…to guide me and to give me suggestions…she was incredibly strong in her own voice, yet very soft. She was like an angel on my shoulder"(#10). "Being an only girl in a family with 3 brothers and my father gave me a voice that was different from the other voices"(#13). "I would probably start with my mother…I think my mom's spirit. It's not what she told us, it was her spirit"(#14). "The first people, of course, were my parents, whose expectations were always that you were capable. There was never a doubt that you weren't capable, so that you always went forward with that in mind"(#15).

Those for whom family of origin support was not available told of other sources that facilitated the expression of their voices. Describing a woman who took her in while traveling abroad, #3 said, "She helped me. She had so much confidence in me. She was a gift--this woman. She was the one person who was so loving and supportive of me, and I have never forgotten her." Referring to a friend who died years ago, #11 related, "He was hugely strengthening in a way I didn't appreciate. He planted the seed of strength." Citing their husbands as teachers and supporters, responses were, "I had never had anyone else push me to be myself…as a woman"(#1). The big thing with my husband is that he was so supportive of absolutely everything I ever

did"(#2). "He's probably the most positive influence of all… cause he thinks I can do anything. He believes in me when I am absolutely so certain that I'm a complete failure. He has never lost confidence in me. He just totally trusts that whatever I do will be great"(#5). "My husband is really a big person here. He's really the wind beneath my wings"(#6).

Interview Question 1b

Tell me the opposite. Describe people or experiences that made you feel powerless to express your voice.

While some participants responded to question 1a with, "Oh, my family!" others replied, "Well, *not* my family." Question 1b uncovered a variety of difficulties that had been endured, especially in families of origin. Abandonment, addiction, disapproval, inappropriate levels of responsibility or expectation, and lack of being seen as an individual were among the challenges the participants experienced. A common theme among over half of the women was negative family of origin dynamics (#1-p.2, #2-p.1,2, #3-p.1,2, #5-p.1,2, #7-p.1,2, #8-p.1, #10-p.2,3, #11-p.1,4, #12-p.5,6). Several women (#1-p.2,3, #9-p.1, #11-p.4, #15-p.1,2,6) assigned negative association to institutional religion. Terms such as rules, rigid, punishment, fear, control, and intimidation, which frequently appeared in response to this question, pointed toward patriarchal dynamics and institutions, wherein authority is hierarchical, and

expression is banished. Equal responses indicated that feelings of fear and intimidation toward fathers and clergy became memories that were met with submission and anxiety in some instances (#1-p.2, #2-p.1,2, #11-p.1), and with rebellion and defiance in others (#7-p.1,2, #8-p.1, #10-p.2,3). Although some experiences had the power to temporarily block expression, none of the interviewees completely acquiesced and allowed their voice to remain silent (#1-p.1,2, #2-p.2, #3-p.1,2, #4-2, #5-p.2, #6-p.2, #7-p.1,2, #8-p.1, #9-p.3, #10-p.1,2,3, #11-p.3, #12-p,1,2,5, #13-p.2, #14-p.2, #15-p.1).

The "school of hard knocks" was acknowledged as both a cruel taskmaster and a brilliant teacher in the interviews. Difficult and challenging situations that had been beyond the power of the interviewee to change taught the lesson of patience and encouraged tenacity in study subjects #2-p.3,4, #3-p.1,3, #5-p.2,3, #7-p.2, #8-p.1, #10-p.2,3,4, #12-p.2,3, #13-p.1,2,3, #14-p.1,2). None of the women interviewed regretted the difficult experiences that helped them to become who they are today.

Interview Question #2

Describe to me how you uniquely express your voice. Tell me anything you'd like about your way of communicating your spirit and your agenda to the world.

The responses to this question truly describe the essence of the feminine voice. As stated in the literature review, the relational feminine psyche is multi-faceted--honoring creativity, responsibility, and authenticity. Consequently, answers to question #2 covered a wide range of patterns and characteristics. Career achievement, maternal experiences, artistic expression through music, decorating, gardening, painting, pottery, or dance, teaching and mentoring, meaningful friendships and relationships, physical activities, and personal spiritual journeys, were all cited as ways in which the interviewees express their essence and their voice.

Expression among these women was intense, yet animated and lively, and the vast field of responses--dazzling. The participants shared autobiographical information with humility and with confidence. A common phenomenon, that was revealed through every manner of expression, was an air of confidence in and comfort with oneself in the way each woman described her unique expression (#1-p.3, #2-p.3, #3-p.3, #4-p.4, #5-p.3,4, #6-p.6, #7-p.2, #8-p.1, #9-p.3,4, #10-p.4,5, #11-p.4,5, #12-p.3,4,5, #13-p.4, #14-p. 3,4, #15-p.2,3.)

Many feminine behaviors, such as being relational, being sensitive to one's environment, being supportive/nurturing, and being physically active were evidenced in response to question two. Additionally, humor and art appeared time after time as

women identified their means of expression. Communication was also frequently mentioned as being an important vehicle of feminine expression. Both the projective and the receptive faces of communication were valued. Both speaking one's truth and listening with one's heart were practiced and respected by these women as means of personal expression. All fifteen women told stories that revealed an ability to express their feeling - assertively, when necessary, and to provide support and encouragement in the form of teaching or motivating others.

The second question appeared to challenge many of the women. Several said that they had never considered how they expressed themselves, and they needed prompting on this question. I complied by citing examples of how I perceived their expression or their presence in the world, and suddenly the participants tracked my connection, and enthusiastically, they continued on their own. Colorful and animated stories revealed varying degrees of directness and/or finesse in the ways participants express their unique essence. The feminine manner is kind and nurturing, yet it is also strong, and often willful. Responses to this question were often punctuated with the power of the women's voices (#1-p.4, #4-p.4, #5-p.2,6, #6-p.4, #7-p.3, #8-p.1, #9-p.4, #10-p.3,4,5, #12-p.1,2,4, #13-p.1,6, #14-p.2,3,5,6, #15-p.8).

Interview Question #3

What impact (positive and/or negative) has the expression of your voice had on your relationship with family, friends, women, men, career. What impact has it had on you?

The perceived impact of their feminine expression was quite diverse, yet not surprisingly so. Almost all of the women told stories of affirmative reflection from family (My children's opinion of me is so exalted, it's like I've already died and gone to heaven. My children think I am the most wonderful thing on the face of the earth. #15), friends (I like to think that I bring out the best in people. I like to think that people are happier after we get to know each other. #15), and business associates (I happen to have this real believability…when you have it, it's the most incredible tool, especially if you know how to use it. #12) and colleagues (So then, all the (others) came over to me--why everybody comes over to me--I don't know--why me? #6). Women who demonstrated artistic and humorous expression told of receiving strong positive feedback throughout their lifetimes #5-p.2,3,4, #6-p.1,3, #9-p.3,4, #10-p.2,4,5, #12-p.2,3,5, #13-p.1,5,6, #15-p.2,8).

On the other hand, half of the women also experienced some negative reaction to the expression of their voice, most commonly within the family setting. These instances frequently occurred with the family of origin in the developmental years

(#1-p.4, #5-p.2, #7-p.1,2, #10-p.3, #12-p.2,6). Yet, five women clearly stated that their husbands or children sometimes were taken aback by the strength and/or directness of their voice (#1-p.4, #4-p.5,6, #7-p.3, #10-p.5, #12-p.2,5). Although they sometimes re-formatted or revised their manner of expression when this occurred, the women did not allow unfavorable responses to silence their voices. This group of women recognized and respected both positive and negative feedback. They understood the value of constructive criticism, and possessed the ego strength to not interpret honest response as blanket censure.

> "I felt very comfortable. Even though I was a very average person, I was just fine"(#4). "What I got out of the whole deal is that I could get angry when anybody would try to shut me down(#7). "If I have a point to make, I'm pretty much not going to shut up until I feel heard"(#10). "Strength is an awful lot about choice. Whether an experience is strengthening or weakening is an awful lot about the attitude we take to the experience"(#11). "Sure, there have been things that have shut me down, but I don't think there's anything that is really happening--short of death, that is going to really shut me down"#13). "So I said, 'Remember, he's trying to get you not to believe in yourself. Remember that that is not true. I know I'm not perfect, but I love myself, and I think that's the key"#14).

Interview Question #4

Describe any strategies tips, or other concepts that you feel might facilitate expression of the feminine voice.

Time after time, similar themes emerged, as the participants suggested the very experiences that facilitated

their own individual expression. The women told stories of being listened to…and listening, of being mentored…and mentoring, of being accepted…and accepting others, of being encouraged…and encouraging others. Receiving support and encouragement from a teacher, motivator, or mentor was a unanimous theme. Being listened to, and really being heard also were frequently mentioned.

The majority of the women advocated personal accountability among women, and encouraged taking responsibility for healing and expression (#1-p.4, #3-p.4,5, #5-p.6,7, #7-p.3,4, #8-p.1, #9-p.5, #10-p.8, #11-p.6, #12-p.7, #13-p.7, #14-p.5,6, #15-p.9,10). Numerous suggestions were made for women to seek out sources of validation and to search within themselves to discover what they really want. Keeping a daily journal, establishing healthy friendships, reading self-help literature, entering therapy, pursuing hobbies, developing talents, caring for one's body, and enhancing one's mind, were all repeatedly suggested as personal tools that facilitate the expression of one's voice.

The interview responses suggest that both external and internal support are necessary to enable true feminine expression. The support of at least one person, as has been clearly stated, is an external requirement for a woman to confidently communicate her essence. As a woman grows, it is

also helpful for her to develop her own internal support system to facilitate expression of her voice. A woman's voice first addresses the woman, as it seeks to express and define itself. If the woman listens to her own voice, through mental, physical, emotional, or spiritual channels, then a healthy ego is born. Ego strength, bolstered by self-acceptance and a positive life perspective, is the cornerstone of mature feminine expression.

Interviewees also believed that a woman must care for her mind and body so that strength is available to her. Physical, professional, artistic, spiritual, and social arenas were suggested as venues for development of a healthy self-concept that will support the feminine voice. Furthermore, it is helpful for a woman to know what she wants, and stand convinced that her wants are of value. What one wants can be identified by journaling, meditating, dreaming, and/or by sharing with a trusted friend or counselor (#3-p.4, #5-p.6,7, #7-p.3,4, #11-p.5,6, #12-p.7, #13-p.7, #14-p.5,6, #15-p.8,9). A woman must have sources of support and validation where she can express her true essence and know that she is heard.

The final suggestion, which all women validated in some way, was to practice… to exercise the mind, the will, the body, the spirit -- and thereby, the voice. Once articulated and supported, it is through the discipline of intentional repetition that the expression of the woman's voice becomes

natural. The women interviewed in this project have practiced and achieved the true expression of the feminine voice (for transcribed interviews, see Appendix 2).

Focus Group

An interesting conclusion to this study was provided by the focus group, in which I gathered as many participants as possible together for a casual dinner in my home. My intent was to share with them what I had learned from the interviews and to allow the women to become acquainted. My anticipation had been that it would be a rather serious and focused gathering. The results of the evening couldn't have been more predictable for a group of dynamic women meeting for the first time, yet also couldn't have held more of a surprise for me. In my preparation and planning I had completely missed the mark. I had created an agenda, both in my mind and loosely on paper, which would have directed the conversation to the information I gathered in the study. But, my plan was to allow the process to guide itself, and to not control the rhythm and flow of the group.

I had read and written about the feminine psyche, and had listened to and transcribed over 100 pages of her expression. Yet I had not considered how the fleshed-out feminine voice, within like company, would (if allowed) guide and direct the group. In my plan for the evening, I had allowed approximately ten minutes for the nine women present to introduce themselves.

Somehow, my personal agenda of and fascination with research created a blind spot in my envisioned plan for interaction between and among these women. Rather than being an opening activity of ten or fifteen minutes, the introductions filled the entire evening.

As we began around the circle, story after story of personal and family history tumbled out. Interaction, consisting (not surprisingly) of support, validation, and encouragement, flowed freely and strongly as the group shared wine and appetizers. To my surprise, a deeper level of sharing, rather than any interest in psychological results of my study, continued through dinner. Tales of financial struggles, odysseys of moves to Aspen, dramas about children and/or parents, anecdotes about health and aging, career and professional sagas--the stories went on and on. The group of women listened to each person intently. No advice was given, no judgments were made. Rather, as each woman shared about herself, her family, her career, or her hobbies, much support and enthusiasm emanated from the listeners.

Part way through the evening I realized the awesome reality of what I was witnessing: the feminine voice being expressed, heard, received, and supported! After all of the coding and categorizing that had been done (not without value), I now had a front row seat to observe and participate in natural and

unencumbered feminine expression. The details of each story no longer seemed paramount. Rather, the relational energy of the feminine voice filled the room and directed the meeting.

Factors that I found to be common to feminine expression were present at the table as surely as were the food and wine being passed. At one point I asked for the floor to share the themes I had identified through the interviews, namely resilience, dedication, humor, creativity, honesty, open-mindedness, curiosity, courage, and love. I watched as each woman tried these themes on for size, adjusted them to fit, and then naturally exercised all of them as the interaction between the women continued.

I emphatically record that the feminine voice is relational! It desires to receive and give support. It can be outrageously funny. It is supportive, empathetic, courageous, and kind. What a rare gift it was to end my research with a live, in-person demonstration of all that I had read and of what I had attempted to describe.

Conclusion

The fifteen women who participated in this study contributed a wealth of information as they responded to the interview questions. They did not excuse away any lack of expression that had occurred in their lives. Some had grown up in an atmosphere where the feminine voice was denigrated (#1-

p.2, #2-p.1,2, #5-p.2, #7-p.1,2, #11-p.4, #12-p.5). Others experienced work or marital situations that attempted to silence their voices (#1-p.2, #5-p.2,3, #6-p.4, #8-p.1, #12-p.1,2, #14-p.2). Yet, fueled by individual resilience, and sustained by a meaningful source or system of support, these women courageously and constantly practiced expressing their own individual and unique voices.

The common themes that emerged were often camouflaged by the delightful individuality of the participants. Yet, as themes were coded and tracked, some simple patterns emerged. Each project participant received a summary of themes in two forms and selected quotes from the interviews (see Appendices 7, 8, and 9). The *encouragement and support* of at least one influential person appeared as the sine quo none for expression of a woman's voice. *Travel, humor, art, and nature* contribute color to the voice expressed. *Education and spirituality* deepen the voice and *physical activity* strengthens it, while *relationships* season it.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

The feminine voice expressed, as cited in the Literature Review and demonstrated in the Results Chapter, is relational, responsible, courageous, creative, empathetic, and loyal. Multifaceted and diverse in delivery, yet emanating from a common spirit, this voice is emerging in Western culture as the 21st century begins. The colorful kaleidoscope of feminine expression invites deeper examination and exploration of its intricate perceptions and its valuable message.

In the classic film "The Sound of Music," Mother Superior sings about the beautiful, spontaneous, and emotional Maria: "How do you hold a moonbeam in your hand?" Trying to contain the hundreds of sparkling bits of personal fire I was exposed to in the course of this study feels equally impossible. The blank page before me challenges me to fill it with words that communicate an essence that can't be contained by paper and ink. This topic is enormous.

Simply stated, the women participants moved toward the positive in their lives, turning challenging or painful experiences to an efficacious end, and encouraging others to do the same. These women transformed negative experiences of failure, loss, or deprivation into positive lessons or opportunities in their lives. Support, validation, and

encouragement were the catalysts facilitating that shift. As the participants in this study shared their stories, I was impressed by their resilience and moved by their courage. Here is the true essence of alchemy in action: turning stones into gold in the lives of fifteen women.

The Literature Review of this paper presented the historical perspective of feminine experience. By uncovering the frightening and often tragic plight of women in Judeo-Christian history, the struggle for feminine expression was revealed. In the preceding century, human existence on this planet changed tremendously. The Great Depression, two World Wars, the Korean War, the tragic Viet Nam War, assassinations, space flights, rebellions, addictions, the dawn of the computer age, extreme affluence and abject poverty, nuclear power, cancer and AIDS--these are but a few of the influences that caused a societal metamorphosis in the 20th century. Standing on this side of the new millennium, in this culture, on this continent, the human voice raises a different cry than it did a hundred, or even fifty years ago.

Part of that voice is feminine, and its expression is now more free and open than it has ever been within Western culture. It is the exciting dynamic of *expression* of that voice that came across so strongly in the interviews in this project. While the Literature Review looked at the past and the present from the

perspective of limitation and struggle, the actual interviews reversed the angle to embrace a positive new freedom of expression.

The message within the message of each participant is that the feminine voice is most worthy of being heard and most capable of being expressed. This voice is about relationship. From the smallest to the greatest interaction, the feminine perceives itself in relationship. Dismissing autonomy as the desired final goal of development, yet often skillfully employing it as a tool, the participants confirmed the relational aspect of the feminine psyche. Unless prompted by a personal question on my part, *none* of the stories that were told were about personal accomplishments. Rather, the participants talked about family, friends, and personal experiences that promoted growth. The women told of receiving support and of using their life energy to pass support forward. Each generation is thereby beneficiary as well as benefactor, as women carry the torch of nurture, and pass it down through time.

The interviews brought forth stories of all kinds. In the final analysis, however, the story content is not the target at which this study takes aim. Rich and powerful as the raw material of this study is, the next level is even more compelling. It is the *process* of remembering, telling, being heard, that fulfills and inspires. The process, i.e. the actual

remembering, telling, or being heard, connects the person to the experience. The process is what designs the language of the feminine. It draws the symbols and invents the letters. It writes the rules of grammar. And ultimately, it is the *experience* of that process that becomes the voice of the feminine. The simple lived experience of receiving and re-cycling support is the actual bottom line of feminine expression. It is what fuels and propels the feminine voice into the world.

What is this voice as it projects onto this current plane? It is a container and a reflector--a container for creative juices, primal wisdom, naked emotion, and fierce dedication. Also, it reflects tenderness, strength, courage, and incalculable love. When dealing with a child or a person in need, the voice is sometimes as gentle as the brush of a feather, and yet, when having to establish boundaries or to secure protection, it can also be as sharp and deadly as the edge of a guillotine. It is truly multi-dimensional, and its many facets cause it to send astonishing rays of light into the world.

The value of feminine personal growth and expression cannot be overestimated. As a girl child is listened to, as her curiosity is encouraged, as she is seen and accepted for who she is, she takes her place in the new order of women who have

shattered the archaic mold that historical patriarchy designed for her. All that she is--bundle of energy and curiosity, is given internal permission to manifest. Here is the ripple effect at its zenith: as this child grows and develops, her concept of self-worth and her level of self-esteem color her life. Her family of origin, her circle of friends, her business associates, her husband or partner, her children or relatives, and her immediate as well as her extended environment are all impacted by her voice. When a woman is free to know, employ, and express her unique feminine qualities, her energy spirals outward.

The ripple effect functions both in micro and in macrocosm. The impact of being heard, seen, encouraged, and supported is true for one girl child, and it is true for women as a whole. By identifying historical, psychological, societal, cultural, family, and religious patterns that have hindered the development and expression of woman's voice, this study has endeavored to push the ripples further. It has listened to, seen, encouraged, and supported the feminine voice, both individually and collectively.

The feminine voice expresses itself both internally and out into the world. Internal conversation can take such forms as creativity, spirituality, intellectual activity, or communion with nature. The internal realm of the feminine hears a voice

that speaks in earth tones, that cries with those who cry, laughs with those who laugh, and merely sits with those who can do neither. Internal expression of the feminine voice is a dialogue between the creative spirit and the creative act; it is a conversation between the sojourner and the student; it is collaboration between the athlete and the artist. When the feminine voice has permission to speak to and with a woman's own soul, the discourse is fascinating.

The feminine voice, as expressed in the world, carries several messages, and delivers them clearly. The sum components of nurture are permanently embedded in feminine expression. Yet, as learned from the readings and experienced in the interviews, the feminine voice holds a high standard of accountability. The voices of the women in this project advocated taking personal responsibility for healing and growth. In addition to being able to listen with rapt attention, the women were also able to speak with firm conviction. They use their speech to motivate, teach, mentor, and encourage personal accountability. The feminine voice is not weak; it communicates a strong message of integrity and authenticity.

Participation in this project was an interesting and provocative experience for those involved. The women expressed a sense of adventure and curiosity as we began each interview. The interview experience proved to be a proto-type of the

process by which the feminine voice is recognized, identified, clarified, and expressed. Although some women came to the interview feeling uncertain yet curious, each woman left feeling accepted and strengthened. She had been welcomed and supported, and her voice had been expressed and heard.

Most participants said that they had never considered these questions before, and they enjoyed the introspective nature of the project. Several commented to me in subsequent encounters that they continue to consider and expand upon their responses. It was my hope that participation in this project would be a positive, productive experience for the interviewees. Their feedback has affirmed my intent. It appears that the process of the interviews and the focus group meeting served to coach the voice of the feminine.

CONCLUSION

This world is home to two genders. As societies and cultures formed over the past several thousand years, most adopted a patriarchal approach to life, in which heritage is traced through the male lineage, and a hierarchical system of authority exists. Western culture developed in patriarchal fashion and assigned authority to the male gender.

During the past century, along with enormous strides in science and technology, changes also began to occur in gender roles. Two World Wars, which emptied the factory and the workplace of male tradesmen, created a crucial void that women were called upon to fill. As women stepped in and accomplished tasks formerly designated as exclusively masculine, they were emancipated from the isolated life of the home. By the sheer nature of their being, women in an office, a grocery, a hospital, or a factory, began to support, validate, and encourage each other. As the decades of the 20th century brought challenge after challenge to Western culture, the momentum of women supporting women continued to escalate. The right to vote, the right to work, the right to be relational and creative, the right to have a voice--such are the changes wrought by women of the past century.

The feminine voice in Western culture is now truly being heard, not only by men, but more importantly, by women

themselves. That voice, like a glowing bed of embers, requires support to keep itself alive. Needed support is available from authors, researchers, entertainers, professionals, and friends. The creative, relational, responsible essence of the feminine is now a tangible presence in Western culture.

This study has researched how support, validation, and encouragement promote the welfare of women and amplify the expression of the feminine voice. It aims to further reinforce that welfare and to bolster that voice. This project, however, is only one small freeze-frame of research. The work has unearthed many other research possibilities that would continue to enhance feminine expression.

The most natural and intriguing area for further research would appear to be a study of the feminine component of the male voice, how its expression could be facilitated, and what the ramifications of that expression would be. Conversely, it would be interesting to similarly study the masculine piece of woman's voice. Keeping within the feminine realm, however, there are many angles that research could take in considering expression of the feminine voice. What is the impact of illness, of poverty, of education, or of birth order? To what degree is innate resilience a determining factor of expression versus external support, validation, or encouragement? Does/or how does expression differ when a girl child received immediate

support from her family or origin as opposed to being validated later in life by friends, teachers, clergy, partners, employers, cohorts, or mentors? What difference is evidenced when support in family of origin comes from the grandmother or the father, rather than from the mother? These are but a few of the many compelling questions that presented themselves in the course of this study.

The process of reading, writing, researching, and reporting for this project has been fascinating, enlightening, educational, and inspirational for me. Little did I know, when I first considered the topic "Coaching the Voice of the Feminine," that by conducting and completing this process, I would make enormous strides towards the expression of my own voice. As the steps of this project were conceived, undertaken, and completed, I was at first unaware that a personal metamorphosis was simultaneously occurring. It wasn't until writing the Results and Discussion chapters that I finally recognized how my own voice was expressed by the creation of this project. My original idea, that support, validation, and encouragement would facilitate expression of the feminine voice, was confirmed for me in personal experience. What an exciting conclusion it is to verify what I have read, written, and heard in my own body and mind, and to express it with my own voice.

A final testament for and to the women who participated in this study is found in Appendix 5, which presents a brief sampling of the wisdom and wit contained in the interview material. As a conclusion to this study, I offer the following few expressions of the feminine voice:

- I think everyone needs a place where they don't feel wrong to find their voice.
- I've discovered incredible strength inside myself--physical strength--that I love.
- I really encourage humor.
- I literally put one foot in front of the other every day, and I just did it.
- So sure, there have been things that have shut me down, but I don't think there's anything that's really happened… short of death! - that's gonna' shut me down.
- There was never a doubt in my mind - ever - that there was anything I couldn't do.
- If I didn't have the struggles I wouldn't--if we all didn't have the struggles, we wouldn't grow. And you know that whole thing about you learn from the bad stuff, and you invite it in, but it's the truth. The harder it is, the more you learn from it.
- I never thought of not being an individual.

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